

FORTY FINE LADIES

By
PATRICK R. CHALMERS

Illustrated by
CECIL ALDIN



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PATRICK R. CHALMERS.

September 1929.

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FORTY · FINE · LADIES



OUT to a party go forty fine ladies—

Forty fine ladies, when noontide is grey,
Light are their feet where the leaf on the glade is,
Sweet are their tongues on the wet winter day.

Forty fine ladies, the queens of the revel,

Forty fine ladies, so lashing and level,

Forty fine ladies who'll dance like the devil—

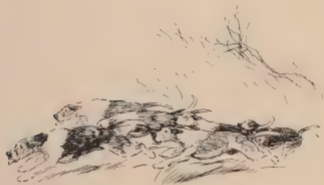
Race, like a smoke wreath, away.



Forty fine ladies, they found in their ballroom,
Such a shy gallant, right miles had he come,
Chased him and raced him, and gave him but small room,
Showed him, the rascal, new reason to roam;
Wicked old dog-fox o'er night come a-wooing;
Forty fine ladies, *they* gave him a doing,
Forty white furies, pursuing, pursuing,
Running him, running him home !

Home from their party go forty fine ladies,
Heads up and sterns up, as gay as the lark,
Dian winks down at 'em, huntress *her* trade is;
Roosty cock pheasants call out in the park;
Forty fine ladies, delighted they'd met him,
Forty fine ladies, who'll hardly forget him,
Forty fine ladies, who tore him and ate him,
Killed in the open at dark !









To a Fox Cub

YOU slipped through the hedgerow's high tangle of bramble,

You knew of the gap by the hazel tree's trunk,

As sharp as a needle, as red as a Campbell,

Surprised, very likely, but not in a funk;

Demure as a kitten, yet wise and hard-bitten,

You pricked a keen ear to the crash in the scrub,

Where foes big and bitter were smashing the litter,

O bandit beginner—O cool little cub!

You went like a dream, yet an eye of cold yellow

You cocked in a crafty but confident glance,

As much as to tell me, "Now, be a good fellow,

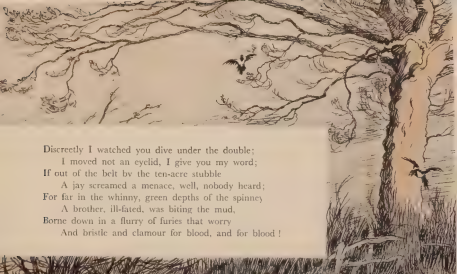
Say nothing about it and give us a chance;

How much less than level's a bet that those devils

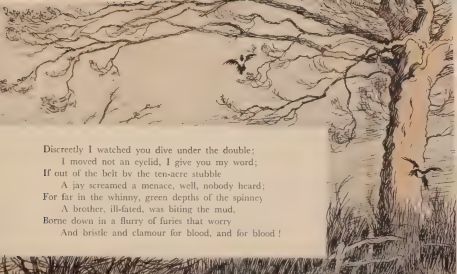
Would eat me—at present—in less than a mile;

I'm small, I'm a baby, sit quiet, and maybe

I'll live to reward you with something worth while!"



Discreetly I watched you dive under the double;
I moved not an eyelid, I give you my word;
If out of the belt by the ten-acre stubble
A jay screamed a menace, well, nobody heard;
For far in the whinny, green depths of the spinney
A brother, ill-fated, was biting the mud,
Borne down in a flurry of furies that worry
And bristle and clamour for blood, and for blood!



And so it's a bargain, my boy, you'll remember;
Some day you'll be wanted to settle the bill;
Some soft misty day in a distant December
When you, a great fox, go away with a will—
Go away without waiting for doubts or debating;
Without hesitating while follow who may,
By galloping good land with never a woodland,
To lose you or eat you a county away!









CUBBING

THEY swarm through the gateway, with outcry and flicker
of stern,

Hounds, in a hustle,

That scatter and bustle,

Crash in the oak-scrub and shatter green oceans of fern:

And their voices are up in a terrible, whimpering mirth,

That drifts through the cover most marvellous, wonderful
sweet,

I hear them (Stand still, mare!) out here in the half-
carried wheat,

For they're on to the litter, the little red cubs that the vixen
put down in our earth


The poor little beggars

They're new to it yet,

And some of 'em's safe to

Get eaten, I bet!





Hark to the music! they're singing as fine as you like.

Twenty-two couple,

So satiny supple,

Dairymaid *that* was, we walked her—

Huic! Dairymaid, *huic!*—

'Tain't discipline talking to hounds when they're hunting, but
no one's to hear,

And I'm proud of our Dairymaid—watch her—the best-
looking hound in the pack,

And it's sun-up and six in the morning, and discipline's
slack,

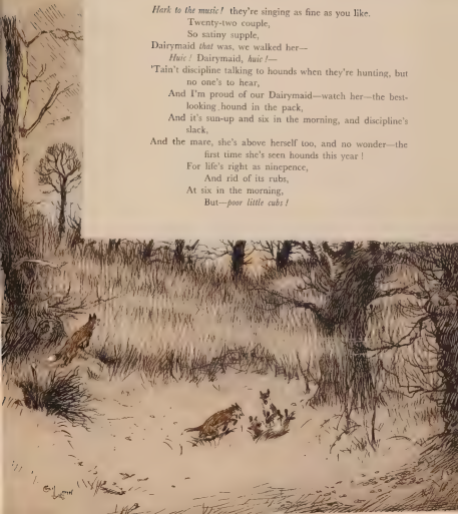
And the mare, she's above herself too, and no wonder—the
first time she's seen hounds this year!

For life's right as ninepence,

And rid of its rubs,

At six in the morning,

But—*poor little cubs!*









THE KILL.

EACH grazing red ox
Lifts his head up and looks;
It's the Fox, it's the Fox!
See the down-diving rooks
And each with a taunt to be rubbed in;
Too hopeless a task
Is his point of just now,
So he's turned his tired mask
From the upland and plough
Once more to the earths he was cubbed in.

But he's stiffer than starch,
And his tongue's a red rag,
And his back's in an arch
And his brush is a-drag,
For the vale's been as heavy as suet;
He's a half-mile to go,
But with all of the pluck
In the world—I dunno—
Well, he'd want all the luck,
All the luck in the world. Ah, I knew it!



Farm Jim over there,
Quite a kind-hearted lad,
Has his hat in the air
And he's yelling like mad,
And Tom's galloping hounds to his holloa;
Pied furies and mud,
How they bristle and press,
For they know that it's *blood*
If Tom *lifts* 'em—no less,
They know there's a worry to follow.

And, "Thank'ee, well done!"
Tom he holloas to Jim,
"Much obliged to you, son,
Hi-yi-yi, lads, that's him!"
And he cheers them "to view" with a rattle;
Who-whoop! the old rover,
In wind and in rain.
Oh, they're rolling him over
And over again,
Among a stampede of red cattle.





The Huntsman's Story



I HEARD the huntsman calling as he drew Three-acre Spinney;

He found a fox and hunted him and handled him ere night,

And his voice upon the hillside was as golden as a guinea,

And I ventured he'd done nicely—most respectful and polite—

Jig-jogging back to kennels, and the stars were shining bright.

Old Jezebel and Jealous they were trotting at his stirrup;

The road was clear, the moon was up, 'twas but a mile or so;

He got the pack about him with a chirp and with a chirrup,

And said he, "I had the secret from my grandad long ago;

And all the old man left me, Sir, if you should want to know.



" And he was most a gypsy, Sir, and spoke the gypsy lingos,
But he knew of hounds and horses all as Nimrod might
have know'd:
When we'd ask him how he did it, he would say, ' You little
Gringos,
I learnt it from a lady that I met upon the road;
In the hills o' Connemara was this wondrous gift bestowed.'

" Connemara—County Galway—and himself a-risin' thirty;
He was taking hounds to kennel, all alone, he used to say;
And the hills of Connemara, when the night is falling dirty,
Is an ill place to be left in when the dusk is turning grey,
An ill place to be lost in most at any time o' day.

" Adown the dismal mountains that night it blew tremendous,
A-sobbing like a giant and a-snorting like a whale,
When he saw beside the sheep-track (' Holy Saints,' says he,
' defend us !')

A mighty dainty lady, dressed in green, and sweet and pale,
And she rode an all-cream pony with an Arab head and
tail.









" Says she to him, ' Young gentleman, to you I'd be beholden
If you'd ride along to Fairyland this night beside o' me:
There's a fox that eats our goslings—them that lays the eggs
that's golden—
And oh, the hounds of Fairyland, 'tis small account
they be,
Sure it wants an advertising pack to gobble such as he ! ' "





"So grandad says, 'Your servant, Miss,' and got his hounds
together,

And the mountain-side flew open and they rode into the
hill;

'Your country's one to cross,' says he, and sorts a stirrup-
leather;

And he found in half-a-jiffy, and he finished with a kill;

And the little fairy lady, she was with 'em with a will.







"Then 'O,' says she, 'young man,' says she, ' 'tis lonesome here in Faerie,

So won't you stav and hunt with us and never more to roam,

And take a bride"—she looks at him—"whose youth can never vary,

With hair as black as midnight and a breast as white as foam?'

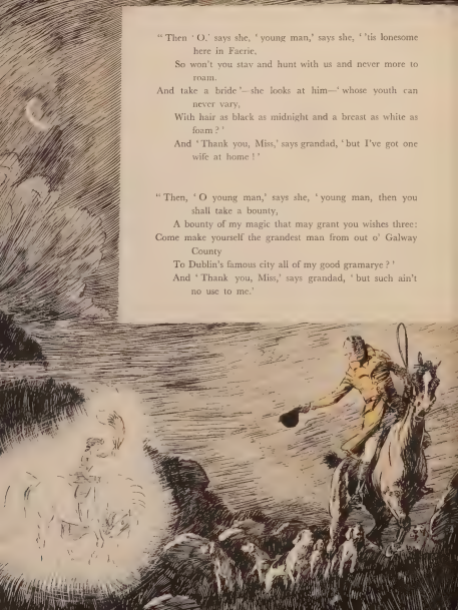
And 'Thank you, Miss,' says grandad, 'but I've got one wife at home!'

"Then, 'O young man,' says she, 'young man, then you shall take a bounty,

A bounty of my magic that may grant you wishes three:
Come make yourself the grandest man from out o' Galway County

To Dublin's famous city all of my good gramarye?'

And 'Thank you, Miss,' says grandad, 'but such ain't no use to me.'



" But he said, since she was pressing of her fairy spells and forces,

He'd take the threefold bounty, lest a gift he'd seem to
scorn:

He'd ask, beyond all other men, the trick o' hounds and horses,

And a voice to charm a woodland of a soft December morn,
And sons to follow after him, all to the business born.

" And—but here we are at home, Sir. Yes, the old man
was a terror

For his fairies and his nonsense, yet the story's someways
right;

He'd the trick o' hounds and horses to a marvel—and no error;
And to hear him draw a woodland was a pride and a
delight;

And—*was it luck entirely, Sir?—I killed my fox tonight.*"







THE BOBTAILED FOX



THE bob-tailed fox was a rare ole sinner
As ever quit cover at a 'untsman's cheer.
As ever coaxed a gosling to come 'ome with him to dinner,
Or barked to a vixen in the moonlight clear;
And we ran him, come each season, as is only orthodox,
But he beat us every gallop, did the bob-tailed fox.

The bob-tailed fox was a rum old clever
As ever left gorse-bush, at the 'orn's sweet twang,
For the greasy grazey grasslands o' the vale, and, "Swelp me
never."

Says Ben at the corner when he sees him go bang,
When he stands in his stirrups while a watchful eye he cocks
Ere he ups his 'and an' 'ollers, "'tis the bob-tailed fox!"





The bob-tailed fox was the game old artful,
 He saw six Novembers, and he robbed and he ran;
 An' monkey tricks—Lord love yer!—he 'ad 'em by the
 cartful

To diddle you owdacious—'ounds, Master and man;
 And your blood three-figure 'orses he would leave 'em cooked
 as cracks

And fourteen miles from Melton, would the bob-tailed fox,

But once old Bob went 'ome 'cross a county;

A 'undred watched him go away, 'eard the merry tune—
 But who saw the finish o' that fifty-minute bounty

When the bitches were upon him in the grey afternoon?
 On the rollin' ridge-an'-farrow came his hour, by all the clocks,
 And we eats him in the open, eats the bob-tailed fox.

To kennel we jogs, the West wet and yellow,

Meets a gent, thrown out an' all, jealous sort o' bloke,
 "H'm! twelve mile point and killed?" says he, *neisty* crabbin'
 fellow, [never spoke;

"And 'changed' as many times, I'll lay." 'Untsman
 Just winked and from his pocket pulled that skimpiest of docks,
 The ruddy muddy rudder of the bob-tailed fox!







CHARLEY



WET'S the mould
And the glade's a-litter;
Nights turn cold
And there's few birds twitter;
Times look sad for us,
Winter knocks,
Here's the lad for us—
Charles James Fox.

Lowers the morn,
But there's scarlet showing;
And a horn
In the big wood's blowing:
Fluster, shy of it,
Pheasant cocks;
And the why of it?—
Charles, Charles Fox.

Song resounds
Where the dead leaf's lying—
Hounds, hounds, hounds,
And the whole pack trying;
Fern-bed quakes with them,
Thorn-scrub rocks,
Echo wakes with them—
Fox! Fox! Fox!

Head in air

And her heart a-knocking
Stands the mare

With her thin ears cocking,
Statue still, to her

Old white socks;
Where's the thrill to her
Like Charles Fox?

Wild red stag

In the West they holloa;
Otter's drag,

Or the hare, some follow;
Nobler than 'em all,

Orthodox,
Though you ran 'em all
Runs Charles Fox.



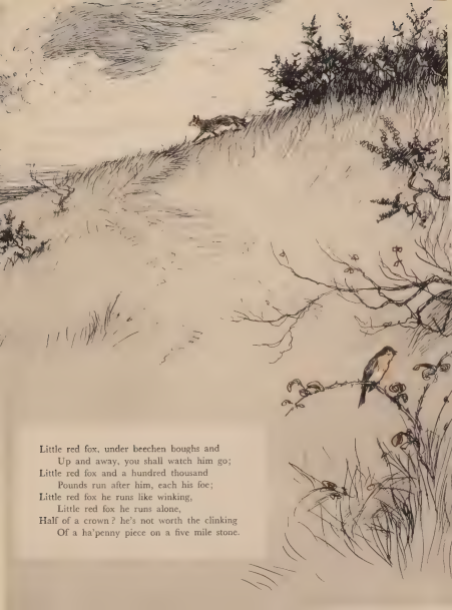






LITTLE RED FOX

Up, says the cynic, gets a guinea,
Bang goes a penny—a useful “brown,”
And, out of blue air a-top of the spinney,
Crumples and crashes half-a-crown;
Yes, that’s the way of the old cock pheasants—
That’s the way of the fine old cocks,
But, gentlemen all, by these—these presents
Pray know the way of our little red fox;



Little red fox, under beechen boughs and
Up and away, you shall watch him go;
Little red fox and a hundred thousand
Pounds run after him, each his foe;
Little red fox he runs like winking,
Little red fox he runs alone,
Half of a crown? he's not worth the clinking
Of a ha'penny piece on a five mile stone.







But look at the style of the hounds and horses
 Look at the cut of the servants' coats,
 Half of a glance my word endorses
 If *not*, just look at the price of oats
 And the fund defraying the cocks-a-doodle
 Late deceased and the bubbly-jocks,
 Then capitalise the whole caboodle
 And find the cost of a little red fox.

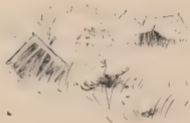
Mud of the vale the pink coat plasters,
 Into the twilight, all forlorn,
 Baffled and beaten, wails the Master's
 Last long note o' the silver horn;
 Up on the hill-side sits a sinner—
 Little red fox, and he's clipped your comb;
 Then less than Nothing goes out to dinner
 And A Hundred Thousand of Pound jogs home.

AND · A · HUNDRED · THOUSAND · OF · POUND · JOGS · HOMI



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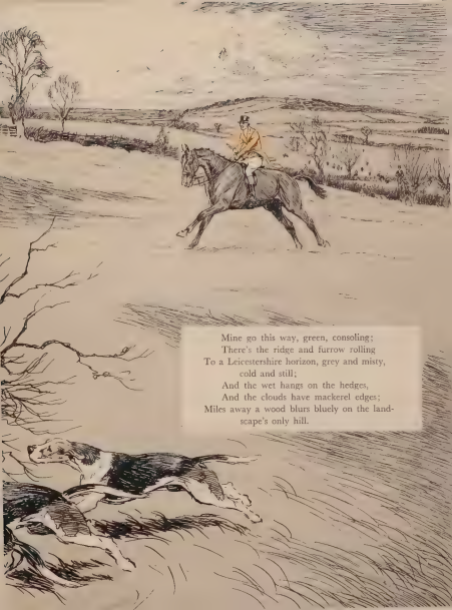


WITH THE MULE TRAIN



MULES and mesas and mosquitoes
And a day that half its heat owes
To its jobs, its dust, the cantrips of its squealing
muley teams;
While the sun-glare, jumpy, aching,
Sets the thirsty levels quaking,
Till a young man might see visions and an old
man might dream dreams.





Mine go this way, green, consoling;
There's the ridge and furrow rolling
To a Leicestershire horizon, grey and misty,
cold and still;
And the wet hangs on the hedges,
And the clouds have mackerel edges;
Miles away a wood blurs bluely on the land-
scape's only hill.







That's his point—I'd have you notice,
Not a tucked-up cur coyote's—
'Tis a big red Midland dog-fox leads across his native grass,
Full of pluck, and full of cunning,
And (at present) full of running,
Raised on turkey-cock at Christmas and on goose at
Michaelmas.



Now in dreams the usual course is
That a chap may choose his horses,
And I've always leant to longtails when there's galloping to do;
But today I'm on a racehorse,
Not some screw hunt-steeplechase horse,
But the sort that wins at Aintree with at least eleven two.







He's the raking powerful jumper;
Though the brook is out a bumper,
Though the blackthorn's dark and hairy with a ditch that's
 deep and wide,
His no scrambled blown endeavour,
Smooth as clockwork, quick and clever,
One turn faster, half an ear-cock, and he's over in his stride !

That's the sort: he fairly smothers
With his gallop all the others;
We're alone when, hackles lifted, hounds are racing for a kill,
And the pirate rooks are stooping
At a brush that's mired and drooping,
And a beaten fox is crawling up the hedge below the hill.





There, they've got him sure and certain;
So—who-whoop! Ring down the curtain—
Mules and mesas and mosquitoes, mighty things have come
to pass,
For a penniless poor devil,
Has had twenty minutes' revel
On a thousand-guinea racehorse and five miles of English grass!





